

34» HOBBS AND THE ABSOLUTE
STATE

knowledge whether the commands of man be
just or unjust
belongs to private men; and that before they
yield obedience
they not only may but ought to dispute them!

" Hobbes
looks back with wistful admiration to the times
before such
questions were raised, when man revered
the supreme
power; when they little used, as in the present
time, to join
themselves with ambitious and hellish spirits, to
the utter ruin
of the state. *' For they could, not entertain so
strange a fancy
as not to desire the preservation of that by
which they were
preserved." To dispel these dangerous
illusions and show
the highway to peace was the most profitable of
occupations.

He proceeds to restate his familiar gospel in a
few lapidary
sentences. The state of nature, without civil
society, is a war
of all against all, in which all men have equal
right to equal
things. *Homo homini lupus.* To escape from
this misery is a
natural instinct. It can only be achieved by
the surrender of
this unprofitable right to some supreme power,
preferably a
monarchy, though all governments deserve
obedience. No
names are mentioned, but he exhorts his
readers no longer to
suffer ambitious men to wade through blood to
power, but to
content themselves with their present state,
even though it
may not be the best. For in establishing civil
society they
sacrifice far less than they secure. *Le mieux est
Vennemi du bien.*

The volume is divided into three parts, entitled
" Liberty/*
" Dominion," " Religion." The whole argument
closely fol-
lows the outlines of 1640, but is more elaborate.
It begins by
challenging, the Aristotelian axiom that man is
a political
animal. On the contrary, men in a state of
nature have a
desire to hurt, chiefly because many covet the
same thing at
the same time. The strongest gets it by the
sword, but he

cannot keep it, for his life is always in danger.
Equally
anyone could say this is mine, but he could not
enjoy it, since
his neighbour would pretend it was his. This
useless right to
all things must be abandoned for the sake of
peace and self-
defence, the craving for which is the first and
fundamental
kw of nature. Death by violence is the
supreme evil which
all men shun. But contracts are worthless
unless they are
kept, and the keeping of trust is the second of
nature's funda-
mental kws. These and many other natural kws,
or virtues of
the mind, which HobBes sets forth in detail,
are immutable
and eternal. " What they forbid can riever be
kwfid; what
they command can never be unkwful." Yet the
moral kw is
only binding in the court of conscience.